

A NOTEWORTHY BOOK.

Botanical Names for English Readers, by R. H. Alcock,
F.L.S. (John Heywood, 1884.)

THIS book will be found both useful and interesting by those students of Botany who—while acknowledging the inadequacy of loosely-applied English names for the purposes of classification and distinction—find the use of apparently arbitrary, meaningless foreign terms both distasteful and difficult.

The first part of the volume contains a "History of Botany," from Hippocrates (B.C. 459) to Robert Brown (A.D. 1858).

The second part includes :

I. An interesting little chapter on our system of nomenclature in which the puzzling matter of the use of capitals for specific names is briefly and clearly dealt with, the following rules being given :—

The small letter is used for the name of a species where the word is an adjective agreeing in gender with the generic name—e.g. *Geranium molle*; *Lotus corniculatus*; *Euphorbia portlandica*.

On the other hand the capital letter is used in the following cases :—

- (a) Where the specific name is taken from the name of a person—e.g. *Lobelia Dortmanna*; *Senecio Jacobæa*.
- (b) Where it is the name of a place in the genitive case—e.g. *Saccharum Teneriffæ*—sugar-cane of Teneriffe (cf. *Saccharum benghalense*—Bengal sugar-cane).
- (c) Where the present specific name was formerly applied singly to a particular plant which has more recently been grouped with other plants in one genus. Thus Yellow Rattle was formerly called simply *Crista-Galli* (Cock's comb); but when Linnæus grouped it with other plants in a genus, being obliged by his "canons of nomenclature" to reject the double word as generic

name, he retained it as trivial or specific name. Names which have thus survived are not descriptive (adjectival) but commemorative and substantive—e.g. *Galium Cristata*; *Polygonum Bistorta*; *Achillea Millefolium*.

- II. Notes on the pronunciation of scientific names, e.g. :—
 - (1) *e* at the end of a word is always to be sounded: e.g. *E-lat-in-e*; *Car-da-mi-ne*.
 - (2) *ch*=*k*: *Chenopodium*; *Chamædrys*.
 - (3) In words beginning with *sci* or *sce* the *c* is soft (except in a few Greek words): e.g. *Scilla*; *Scirpus*.
 - (4) *Sch* is hard: e.g. *Schænus*=*Skeenus*.
 - (5) *c* and *g* are soft before *e*, *i*, *æ*, and *æ*, hard elsewhere: e.g. *acer*, *Vicia*, *Genista*, *Digitalis*, etc. Exception, Greek *g* is always hard, e.g. *Geum* (not *Jeum*), *Potamogeton*.

Some common mis-pronunciations are noticed and corrected. It is right to say—

<i>Cle'matis</i>	<i>Glad'iolus</i>
<i>Ar'butus</i>	<i>Eri'ca</i>
<i>umbili'cus</i>	<i>Ænothe'ra</i>
<i>Veroni'ca</i>	<i>marit'inum</i>
<i>vulga'ris</i>	not <i>vulgah'ris</i>
<i>Alys'sum</i>	<i>At'ropa</i>
<i>Cau'calis</i>	<i>Monot'ropa</i>
<i>Helleb'orus</i>	<i>Myri'ca</i>
<i>Nep'eta</i>	<i>Py'rola</i>
<i>Rese'da</i>	<i>Ac'orus</i>
<i>Aj'uga</i>	<i>An'themis</i>
<i>Asper'ula</i>	<i>Asperu'go</i>
<i>Fi'lix-mas</i>	<i>Ballo'ta</i>
<i>Barbare'a</i>	<i>Cardami'ne</i>
<i>Cy'anus</i>	<i>Com'arum</i>
<i>Apari'ne</i>	<i>Junip'erus</i>
<i>fas'ione</i>	or <i>fasi'one</i>
<i>Lath'yris</i>	<i>Leuco'jum</i>
<i>Lip'aris</i>	<i>Lol'ium</i>
<i>Lonice'ra</i>	<i>Ly'copus</i>
<i>Matthi'ola</i>	<i>Melam'pyrum</i>
<i>Mus'cari</i>	<i>Myriophyl'lum</i>
<i>Obi'one</i>	<i>Onob'rychis</i>
<i>Orni'thopus</i>	<i>Ox'alis</i>

<i>Oxyt'ropis</i>	<i>Papa'ver</i>
<i>Pastin'aca</i>	<i>Peuced'anum</i>
<i>Phal'aris</i>	<i>Polys'tichum</i>
<i>Poly'gonum</i>	<i>Polygon'atum</i>
<i>Rhodi'ola</i>	<i>Sal'sola</i>
<i>Sam'olus</i>	<i>Saxif'raga</i>
<i>Tele'phium</i>	<i>Sil'ybum</i>
<i>Sina'pis</i>	<i>Symph'ytum</i>
<i>Serpyll'um</i>	<i>Tragopo'gon</i>
<i>Ape'ra</i>	<i>affi'nis</i>
<i>axilla'ris</i>	<i>heterophyl'lus</i>
<i>ni'tidus</i>	<i>panic'ea</i>
<i>piperi'ta</i>	<i>pro'lifer</i>
<i>pusil'lus</i>	<i>seg'etum</i>
<i>tetrag'onum</i>	<i>tri'color</i>
<i>tri'fidus</i>	<i>Versic'olor</i>

III. A list of substantive names (generic and specific) of British plants with pronunciation, derivation and meaning.

These meanings and derivations are often extremely curious. Thus, some names connect certain plants with classical stories:—

Achillea was named by Theophrastus after Achilles, who first discovered that it heals wounds.

Adonis, after Adonis the favourite of Venus, changed by her into this flower when killed by a wild boar.

Hyacinthus non-scriptus, or *Agraphis* (=not written) from Hyacinth, a youth killed accidentally by Apollo and changed into a flower (similar to this) whose leaves bore, in dark streaks, the initials of his name. This plant, as the name shows, is without these markings.

Andromeda, after the heroine, because it grows on turfey hillocks in the midst of swamps "frequented by toads and other reptiles." (Linnæus.)

Artemisia, from Artemis (Diana) or from Artemis, wife of King Mausolus, who gave her name to it on adopting it.

Atropa, from Atropos, the Fate whose duty was to cut the thread of life—deadly Nightshade.

Centaurea, or *Chironion*, from the fact that it healed Chiron the Centaur when he wounded his foot by letting fall one of Hercules' arrows as he examined them.

Cypripedium—*Cypris*, surname of Venus; *podion*, slipper. Lady's Slipper.

Daphne, after the nymph changed into a laurel bush, because some species have laurel-like leaves.

Narcissus, from the well-known story of the youth who fell in love with his own face mirrored in a pool. But Pliny says it is derived from "narce"—torpor, and an old poet, Pamphilus, remarks that Proserpine was gathering these flowers long before Narcissus was born.

Pæonia, in honour of Pæon, who cured the wounds received by the Gods during the Trojan war.

Smilacina, after Smilax, a beautiful shepherdess who was changed into a plant.

Thesium, from a plant used to form the crown competed for in the games instituted in honour of Theseus, King of Athens (died B.C. 1235).

Other classical derivations are, for example:—

Blitum (Amaranth)—"insipid," a term of reproach applied (says Pliny) by husbands of Menander to their wives.

Betonica, from the Veltones of Spain, who first discovered the plant.

Clinopodium—Bed-foot (cf. clinical), from its tufts, like the knobs at the foot of a bed (Discorides).

Calcitrapa, from caltrops, a spiked iron-ball thrown in battle under the enemy's cavalry: reference is here made to the prickly calyx of the Star Thistle.

Chelidonium (Gr. chelidon, a swallow). Pliny writes that swallows use it to restore the sight of their young in the nest, also that it flowers just during the time when swallows are here.

Gentiana, from Gentius, King of Illyria, who first discovered the plant (Pliny).

Inula, from Helen of Troy, from whose tears it sprang.

Lysimachia, either from Lysimachus, King of Macedonia (d. B.C. 281), who discovered it, or from *Lysi*—dissolving, and *mache*—battle, because it appeased the strife of oxen at the plough. Loose-strife.

Medicago, named *Medice* by the Greeks because introduced by the Medes.

Mentha, after a nymph who was changed into mint.

Ophrys (Greek, eyebrow), mentioned by Pliny as imparting a blonde tint to the hair.

Words connected with later history and legend are :—

Barbarea, dedicated to Saint Barbara.

Carduus Marianus, the white veins of which are connected with the Blessed Virgin in the same way as the Milky Way is associated with a heathen goddess.

Carlina = Carolina. L. Carolus = Charles. From a tradition that the root was shown to Charlemagne by an angel as a remedy for the plague which prevailed in his army.

Geranium Robertianum derives its specific name from having been used in Germany to cure a disease known as Ruprechts Plage, from Robert, Duke of Normandy.

Veronica = *Heira*, sacred, and *eicon*, picture.

Many names are, again, derived from names of great botanists—e.g. *Linnæa*, *Bartsia*, *Claytonia*, *Lobelia*, etc.

Numerous also are names referring to medicinal properties, etc., e.g. :—

Podagraria. G. *podagra* = gout in the feet. Goutweed.

Alyssum. Gr. *a*—not, and *lyssa* = canine madness.

Ptarmica = causing to sneeze. Sneezewort.

Asperula Cynanchica = rough quinsy plant or Squinancy wort.

Calluna = cleansing, ling being used for brooms.

Sanguisorba = blood-absorbing.

Euphrasia = gladness. Fr. Casselunettes, German Augentrost, English Eyebright. Old names *Ocularia* and *Ophthalmica*.

Interesting names are abundant—e.g. :

Chrysanthemum Leucanthemum (Moon daisy) = Yellow flower White flower.

Adoxa = without glory, humble.

Anemone, or wind flower, was supposed not to open till beaten by the wind.

Arctium Lappa = the bear that tears (bur).

Bella donna is too obvious to need explanation, as also *Alchemilla*.

Odontites was so called by Pliny because it cures toothache.

Beta (Beet) is named from the shape of its seed—like Greek b.

Butomus is called "ox-cutting" because its leaves cut the lips of cattle.

Cardamine means "heart over-powering."

Carpinus means Hornbeam or "yoke-wood."

Cratægus Oxyacantha (Blackthorn) = the strong plant with sharp thorns.

Dipsacus means "the thirsty one," referring to the Teasel's little cisterns at the base of its connate leaves.

Erigeron and *Senecio* (Fleabane and Groundsel) are so named because their downy fruits recall the hoary heads of old men.

Fritillaria Meleagris means "a dice-box (marked like) a guinea-fowl," thus quaintly describing colour and form.

Helleborus means "the taker away of food," an allusion being made to its emetic powers.

Impatiens Noli-me-tangere is too obviously descriptive to need explanation.

Juncus means a tie or bond, and is the name of rushes.

Leonurus, *Myosurus*, *Cynosurus*, *Lagurus*, *Hippuris*, and *Alopecurus*, mean respectively "tail of lion, mouse, dog, hare, horse, and fox," while *Lepturus* means "slender tail."

Doronicum means "giver of victory."

Fumaris is so called because Pliny says it makes the eyes water just as smoke does.

Luzula (Woodrush) means "Glow-worm," in reference to the effect of the hairy heads wet with dew seen by moonlight.

Lychnis means "Lamp-plant," either on account of flame-like flowers, or because the down of some species was used for lampwicks.

Monotropa = flowers all turning one way.

Myosotis = mouse-ear, from the leaves.

Nasturtium = "nose-twister," from its pungent aroma.

Origanum = the mountains' joy (Marjoram).

Orabanche = "leguminous plants I strangle," and is the name of a parasite on the *Papilionaceæ*.

Paris = equal, on account of its symmetry.

Sedum = the "squatting" plant, because it settles anywhere with scarcely any soil.

Triglochin = three points, referring to three angles of capsule.

Trollius = the flower of the troll, or malignant supernatural being, referring to its poisonous acrid properties.

Tulip = turban-flower.

Bellis Perennis means "a thing of beauty (and presumably a joy) for ever."

One could multiply examples of similar interest *ad infinitum* did space allow.

The book closes with—

IV. A list of adjectives used as specific names, with meanings, and

V. An excellent index.

The book is beautifully printed and well bound—in every way deserving of a place on the shelves of every botanist; the orderliness with which it is planned, together with the delightful clearness and conciseness of the language and the evident enthusiasm of the author for his subject, make this little work a pleasing contrast to most of the laborious and, too often, dry-as-dust *Dictionaries* or *Glossaries* of botanical terms.

K. R. H.

THE LOST ART OF CONVERSATION.

THERE are many lost arts. The "twentieth" genius can neither stain glass nor make likenesses in *cuire bouillie*. The "twentieth" hostess has forgotten how to *tenir salon*, and where, oh, where, is the brilliant conversationalist?

In my youth I was frequently shown the portrait of an enchantress of the Georgian era. It was a beautiful face, but it was not that upon which those who had known her dwelt. "People used to come for miles to hear her talk," was always the triumphant conclusion of the catalogue of her perfections.

A history of the Art of Conversation would afford room for reflection. Originally it was the medium for all teaching and interchange of ideas. The Platonic dialogues and the schools of the peripatetic philosopher brought the art to perfection. The great man conducted his orchestration of thought and expression, setting the time for the whole, but he indulged in no dreary monologue and did not monopolize the conversation. Each man added his quota, all were free to express an opinion without false shame and each received due consideration. Even when laughed out of court as obviously ridiculous a

suggestion was carefully proved to be a fallacy before its dismissal. In the dark ages conversation, as such, perished. Hair-splitting disputations among the monkish "schoolmen," and chanted recitations of some warrior's deeds over the wassail bowl, were its only remaining shadows. Story-loving, story-telling, Italy kept the sacred lamps glimmering in the form of narration; but it needed the life-giving breath of the Renaissance to loose the bands of men's tongues. Erasmus and Sir Thomas More may have led the way, but they had many followers. In the reign of James I. we have the ever-delightful Selden's *Table-Talk*, and the dialogues in Shakespeare's plays show what a play of words and wit the men and women of his day were accustomed to and used familiarly.

Scandal eclipsed conversation for the greater part of the eighteenth century until Dr. Johnson revived it in the form of the monologue. Coleridge's uncontrolled dreary rhapsodies were hardly conversation, but they at least show us that listeners were to be had in those days. Of the glories of Holland House who shall speak? There, indeed, met coteries of lions, none so great as to dwarf all the others, none so insignificant that he could not "pay his scot and bear his lot."

And nowadays? According to the modern novel there are occasional meteors of the "Dodo" type, who pepper their talk with epigrams and audacities, and there are a few good after-dinner speakers among men like Mr. Chauncey Depew, but, oh, ye gods and little fishes, what of the others?

Go to any social function and listen to the talk, share in it too if you must! The opening gamut is invariably the weather, which leads to the state of the roads, so to cycling and the inevitable "free wheel," golf or hockey. Bridge, motors and photography will follow if there are both men and women present; if women only, then the luckless victim is dragged through the mill of clothes, servants, babies, or incipient love-affairs!

The modern young person does not even talk, it does not even ask questions, it plays games, and, when it cannot think of anything else to say, either flirts (like the miserable man in *Punch*) or sits in a silent lump reducing the hostess to despair. Sometimes this arises from mere laziness, but more often from sheer inability to find a subject and then say anything